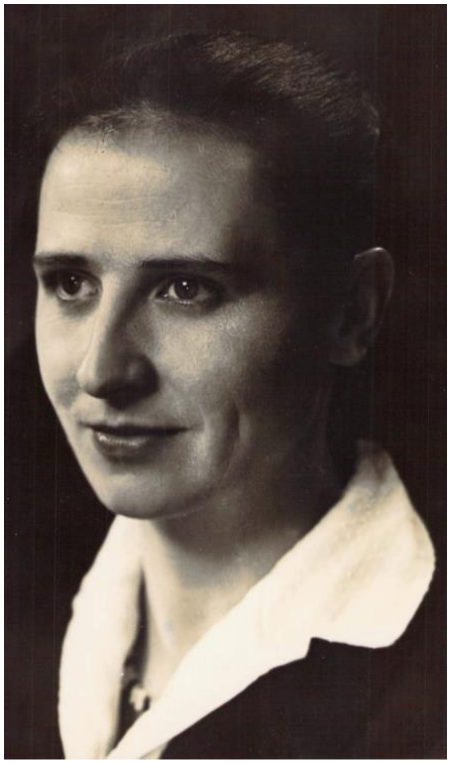
ALICE'S PUPPETS – 1959 and 1987

Alice in the late fifties

Alice made a first series of papier-mâché puppets for her children in 1959 in Chicago. She learned how to make them from library books, as she recalls. To the papier-mâché paste made of flour and water she remembers adding a preservative powder that could have been salt or baking soda, to prevent mold.



After drying and painting the puppets, she covered some of them with a varnish. She

would put on shows in the kitchen for our friends and us, with Jean doing the sound effects. Unfortunately the plots of those puppet shows are lost in the mists of time.

At our departure from Chicago in 1961 she also made a piñata, with three layers to be broken through and the inner core containing pennies, as Jean later recalled.

At left: from left to right - Jean, a friend, Sonya, Madeleine, Eve, Ingrid
At right: the children looking up at the piñata are wearing festive paper crowns made by Alice

In 1987 in Jodjakarta, Alice made a second series of puppets and another piñata, this time for her grandchildren. The second set was less elaborate. She didn't add a "skin" of paper strips to

Alice in 1987

smooth over the lumpier papier-mâché dough used to model the faces, as she had for the first set. The hands were less detailed, but all puppets had them (in the first series the puppeteer's fingers often substituted for the puppets' arms and hands). There was an Indonesian and a Lebanese couple, from our experience of living in those two countries. The grandfather became recognizable as Verne, with some of his own white hair, and his shoulder bag made from the same fabric as the real one that Alice had made for him.

… the pets …

… the parents…

… the grandparents …

From left to right, Martin, Henry, Henry again with the wolf puppet, Eve pregnant with Suzanne (she painted the head she is holding), Tom. And below Henry and Tom

Sea shells for the eyes and teeth

Starting at left: Theresa, Rebecca, Abigail, Henry, Tom. Also present were Adrienne, Idris, and baby Suzanne.

Limnati puppet shows 1993 and 2004

Scenery backdrop – created by the children present in 1993.

The signs read, from left to right: “17 hours and ¾ to Wack-E-Ville”, “How fast R U driving anyway?!”, and “10 feet to Wack-E-Ville”. The photo at right shows the audience, including, from left to right, Theresa, Christopher, Abigail, Rebecca, Jean (filming as usual) and Maritza. Unfortunately, the video filmed by Jean has not yet surfaced. Presumably, Alice was the puppet master in this instance.

The last known puppet show might have been in Limnati, in August 2004, as per Meno: “Gigi and Émilie did a puppet show for Julene today with Mom's beautiful puppets. She really enjoyed it and participated by answering all the questions that the puppets were asking her. She was a little afraid of the big puppet that was supposed to be Collin because Gigi was speaking in a deep loud voice. It was a really good puppet show." In preparation for this show, Alice had undertaken, earlier that year, the enormous task of revitalizing the puppets from Indonesia, which had greatly suffered from the humidity in Jodjakarta.

Excrescences had to be scraped off, here and there a nose or chin had to be added or remodeled, then the puppets were repainted.

Synopses of the puppet shows performed in June 1988

The audience consisted of Rebecca, Abigail, Theresa, plus parents and grandparents.

"Le Babi Kecap" – performed by Meno and Jean - can be seen at this link (duration 48 mn): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fnufxUexXXmA62-grl21iYKXf8VJflnR/view?usp=sharing

As the show begins, two puppets unfurl a scroll showing the title of the play. The son is going out to get food for his children and parents and wants to get a "babi" (or pig in Indonesian). Unfortunately he does not know what a "babi" looks like, so attempts unsuccessfully to capture different creatures, including a wolf and a mouse.

After each failed attempt he returns for advice from Dad, but always rushes off before he can get the full information (the puppet playing Dad is recognized by the audience as Grandpapa Verne), thus leading to the next predictable failed attempt. Meanwhile the audience is enthusiastically advising the son (recognizable as Jean). Dad's wise pronouncements are comically punctuated by rhythmic raps like in a wayang kulit show, meant to convey the majesty and authority of the character. Sometimes the assistant is slow to produce the raps and Dad is annoyed, other times the assistant continues the raps after Dad stops speaking and Dad is also annoyed, yelling: "tchukup!" (meaning "enough" in Indonesian). In between scenes we see various pairs of puppets making their way across the stage, but no explanation is provided.

Mom is getting worried about being able to feed the children, and the children are getting hungry. Finally Dad advises his son to just do the best he can to provide for his family, even if it doesn't reach the level of his ambition of getting a "babi". Two puppets now unfurl a new scroll which reads "Le Pisang Goreng" (fried bananas), while the son triumphantly brings home a big bunch of bananas.

Finally Mom manages to feed her family, which suddenly gets augmented by the other members of the family coming from far away (the pairs of puppets making their way

across the stage). Everyone is happy and the play ends with two puppets unfurling a third scroll which reads “Le End”, and the performers emerging under acclamations to take their bow.

“Promenons nous dans les bois” – performed by Alice and Meno (from Jean’s video – “Bali II – Yogyakarta 6-88) – The wolf (played by Alice) appears and is very hungry, and asks after his favorite little boy, then goes off to dress. The little boy dressed in yellow (played by Meno) sings all the verses of the song while the wolf successively dons an apron, jacket, eyeglasses, tie, hat, shoulder bag, and smokes a pipe, then chases after the little boy.

Visit to Grandpapa – performed by Alice and Meno (from Jean’s video – “Bali II – Yogyakarta 6-88) - the end (duration 3mn 17s) can be seen at this link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/14wL_w4mADw7zD2hCeQdf89ze5u9uYbxQ/view?usp=drive_link

The mouse (played by Alice) appears and asks after someone (not clear who) then goes to hide. The little boy (played by Meno) appears and announces a visit to Grandpapa, who is sick. He brings a basket and proceeds to fill it up little by little with gifts for Grandpapa: a balloon, a pot holder, some flowers, a lollipop, and a chocolate square. While the little boy goes off stage to gather his gifts, a mysterious hooded person with a red Javanese mask shows up and declares that he is very hungry, inspecting the basket each time the little boy goes off to get another item. When the lollipop appears, the person decides to wait a little longer, hoping for a chicken. The videotape ends at that point. The “Babi kecap” videotape shows that the play ended with the masked person being chased with a stick, and a shower of chocolates and lollipops for the spectators.

Thirty years apart – comparing the two sets of puppets – at left the earlier series

The teacher

The artist

The scary wolf

Accessories

The families

The young women

The piñatas

Alice’s puppets: https://photos.app.goo.gl/TjugV3MY88greMpX9

First edition - Chicago 1959

Alice’s puppets – second edition, Jodjakarta 1987